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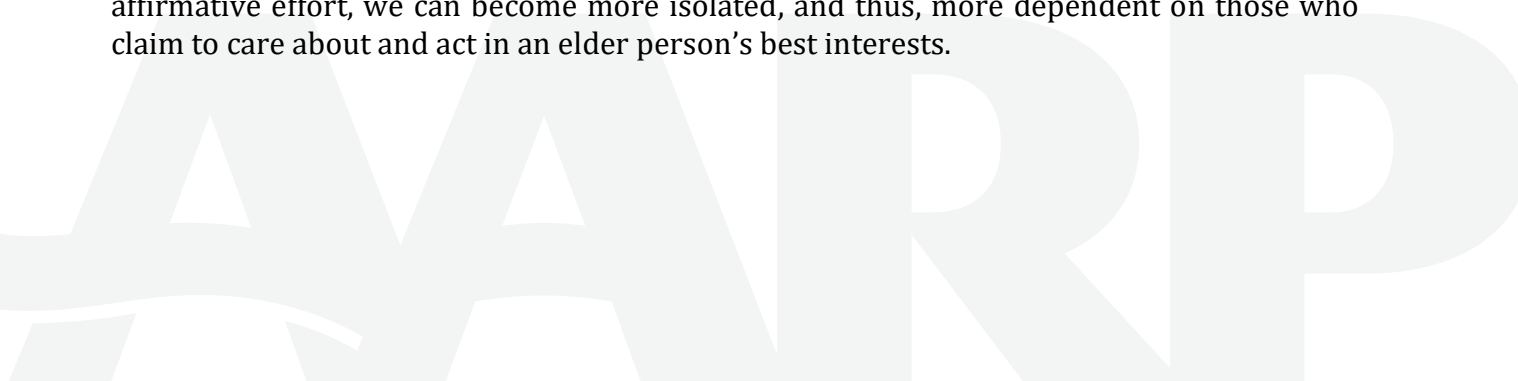
SB 797 – Task Force on Preventing and Countering Elder Abuse
FAVORABLE
Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee
February 23, 2023

Good Afternoon, Chairman Smith and Members of the Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee. I am Karen Morgan, a member of the Executive Council for AARP Maryland. As you may know, AARP MD is one of the largest membership-based organizations in the Free State, encompassing almost 850,000 members. **AARP MD supports SB 797 – Task Force on Preventing and Countering Elder Abuse.** We thank Senators Hettleman and Jennings for introducing this legislation.

This proposed legislation is needed because of the bad news. The bad news is that in 2023, it seems that elder citizens are no more secure in their persons and safe from abuse than they were in 1923!

In some ways, elder citizens are more at risk for abuse as bad actors can use the Internet and other technological advances and devices to invade the peace that every elder person should be able to enjoy. It is bad news that those with ill intent can decide, far too often, to weaponize their use of violence, power, intimidation, threats, coercion, and manipulation to disrupt or destroy the personal sanctity of elder citizens. Far too often, they can perpetrate their crimes without being held accountable for their actions. It is unacceptable that these bad actors come shrouded in the garb of those who are supposed to be protectors. In other words, these people can be caregivers, health providers, lawyers, accountants, insurers, and even spouses, children, grandchildren, nieces, and nephews.

The image of the “doddering old person” is far more rooted in demeaning caricature and stereotype than in reality. But what does seem to be evident is that, as we get older, we acquire more resources that are subject to violation. Those who are older are more likely to own real estate, more likely to have significant financial resources held in investment accounts, and may be receiving income on a regular basis, like annuities, Social Security payments, and even pensions. As we become older, we may become more susceptible to physical and emotional injury. What also seems to be true is that as we age, without affirmative effort, we can become more isolated, and thus, more dependent on those who claim to care about and act in an elder person’s best interests.



What makes this issue even more difficult to attack is that we don't have good information on the prevalence of abuse. The preamble to this bill notes that according to the National Council on Aging, 1 in 10 adults age 60 and older are being abused. In Maryland, the Governor's Office of Crime, Prevention, Youth, and Victim Services reported that an older adult is abused every five seconds – but that was 8 years ago, in 2015. Underreporting is obviously rampant. We can safely assume that those cases of abuse that come to light are, unfortunately, only a fraction of cases that actually occur.

But there is good news. And it comes in the form of this bill. This bill calls on those with extensive expertise in dealing with elder and vulnerable adults to come together to develop a comprehensive approach to addressing elder abuse. Such an approach includes innovative ideas, and recommendations for systemic changes and new laws to help encounter, reduce, and, hopefully, prevent elder abuse.

The bill rightly points out that abuse is a specter darkening the lives of not just those who are considered “vulnerable” as a matter of law, but also those who are elder, but not vulnerable. Elder citizens may not be vulnerable, but that does not also mean that they are not uniquely at risk.

We need the framework for attacking elder abuse that is called for in this bill. It calls for task force members to look at the role of state government and to make recommendations regarding changes to laws and/or consideration of new laws that can help attack this problem – and get results. This bill requires task force members to look at existing social service policies, funding, and prosecutorial approaches to uncover the obstacles that prevent elimination of elder abuse.

AARP Maryland proudly represents those who are ages 50 and older. But we are also mindful that in trying to protect and help those who are older, we are also trying to help those who are younger, too. We are mindful that no one leaves this world younger than when they came in. And as we become older, we deserve the chance to manage our lives in a world that does not tolerate abuse. SB 797 is needed because it would require the state to take important steps toward this goal.

AARP MD supports SB 797 and respectfully requests that the Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee issue a favorable report. For questions, please contact Tammy Bresnahan, Director of Advocacy for AARP Maryland at tbresnahan@aarp.org, or by calling 410-302-8451.